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CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

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CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The gap in capabilities between the United States and her European Allies is well documented and accepted as a problem by the leadership on both sides of the gap. The United States is recognized as the world's dominant power and probably the only super power. Members of the French elite even refer to the United States as a hyperpower to emphasize the disparity between the power of the United States and that of the rest of the world. In spite of its immense relative power, the United States still does not have the ability to engage effectively, all over the world, all of the time. The United States must still operate with allies and coalitions of the willing to achieve her foreign policy and national security objectives. If these allied and coalition operations are to be effective, the United States must determine a way to minimize the effects of the capabilities gap.

Closing the gap will be a difficult endeavor. No single, readily apparent, significant threat to European interests and security has existed since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union. Defense budgets throughout Europe have declined significantly over the past ten years. Funding priorities lie in social programs and economic reform rather then defense and security concerns. Additionally, since *Operation Allied Force* in Kosovo, the leadership of the European Union has chosen to strengthen the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) with capabilities separate from NATO. This could be a source of competition for scarce defense dollars if it results in duplication of effort. This paper will analyze the gap and its implications

for United States National Security Strategy and then recommend some concepts that might help close the gap, at least partially.

THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs' vision embodied in the document *Joint Vision 2020* states that the global interests and responsibilities of the United States will endure and the threats to those interests and responsibilities will not disappear.[1] The document also states that the United States will continue to have global interests and will remain engaged with a variety of regional actors. In defense of these interests, and in keeping with this regional engagement policy, the armed forces of the United States must be prepared to operate effectively with multinational forces.[2]

The close relationship between the United States and her European Allies is described in the Department of Defense Document *Strengthening Transatlantic Security. A U.S. Strategy for the 21st Century.* According to this document, the vital interests of the United States that exist in Europe include physical security and territorial integrity of our nation and those of our allies, as well as the enduring commitment to the principles of democracy, human rights, individual liberty, and the rule of law.[3]

The policy of engagement that the United States has pursued over the last eight years, and appears likely to continue, with some modifications, under the leadership of the Bush Administration, spreads the assets and capabilities of the armed forces of the United States very

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[1] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2020* (Washington, D.C., June 2000), 1

[2] Ibid, 5

[3] Department of Defense, *Strengthening Transatlantic Security. A U.S. Strategy for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C., December 2000), 5

thin. At the same time, for numerous cultural, social and political reasons, the United States will only be able to effect regional issues on the periphery and can not expect to dictate the outcome of world events in every region.

It is clear, that the armed forces of the United States will be required to operate efficiently, on a regular basis, with multinational forces. Developing a robust interoperability will become paramount if these operations are going to succeed. This is an exceptionally difficult task at the Joint level and the problem is greatly exacerbated at the multinational or combined level. The added complexities include conflicting or mismatched national interests, language barriers, differing operational procedures and finally the capabilities gap.

THE HISTORY OF THE GAP

The capabilities gap is a phenomenon that has developed in the Post Cold War period and has been noted in all of the major military operations that the United States and her Allies were engaged in during the 1990's. *Operation Desert Storm* (1991) was the first major operation that brought the existence of the gap to light. The forces of the United States demonstrated superior capabilities, with respect to the coalition partners, across the spectrum of operations during the war. *Operation Deliberate Force* (1995) in Bosnia and *Operation Allied Force* (1999) in Kosovo showed that the gap had widened and now had a detrimental impact on coalition operations.

The gap in military capabilities exists in several areas, to include: command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) and tactical force mobility and application (which involves precision guided munitions [PGMs], strategic lift, in-flight refueling, suppression of enemy air defenses [SEAD], and combat search and rescue [CSAR]). These areas have impact at all levels of the military campaign from the national

strategic level down to the unit level tactical environment. It is this broad impact that has made it apparent that the gap has a detrimental impact on coalition operations.

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENSE

As the depth and breadth of the gap became apparent during *Operation Allied Force* the European Allies came to realize the extent to which they were dependant on and subject to the power of the United States. This realization has led to a move to strengthen the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). ESDP was conceived to provide a stand alone military capability within the European Union (EU) and separate from NATO and the United States. Efforts to make ESDP a reality could help reduce the capabilities gap if they provide the national interest and political will to fund required force enhancements. However, it is likely that these efforts will cause a duplication of capabilities between NATO and the European Union that would compete for the limited pool of resources currently available.

At the NATO Washington Summit in April 1999 (held while *Operation Allied Force* was being conducted) the 19 heads of state adopted a new Strategic Concept to prepare the Alliance for current and future challenges. This Strategic Concept embraced the principles of Defense Secretary Cohen's Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI) to develop military capabilities to carry out new missions and improve interoperability. Additionally, the Strategic Concept embraced the principle of a European Security and Defense Initiative (ESDI, established at the NATO Conference in Berlin in June 1996), within the auspices of NATO's military structure, to gain a more effective European contribution to Alliance security.[4]

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[4] Department of Defense, 11

The objective of DCI was to improve capabilities in five functional areas: deployability and mobility, sustainability and logistics, command and control information systems, effective engagement (PGMs and SEAD), and finally survivability of forces and infrastructure. The five functional areas were divided into 58 tasks to improve specific capabilities and these tasks were translated into "Force Goals." This framework provides a structure to direct and monitor the efforts to improve NATO military capabilities.[5]

While this plan gave the Allies a map with which to guide improvements in their military capabilities *Operation Allied Force* made it painfully clear that the capabilities gap had become huge. On top of that was the perception on the part of the Allies, particularly France, that they were forced to follow in the footsteps of the American leadership. There were three specific areas that made the Allies uncomfortable with the manner in which *Operation Allied Force* was conducted. First of these was the fact that the Alliance did not gain a mandate from the United Nations to conduct this operation against a sovereign nation. Next was the perception that the United States leadership was very selective and protective of the intelligence information that was gathered during the operation and that much information was withheld from the allies. And finally, the perception that the United States leadership was too risk averse (zero death mentality) and therefore structured rules of engagement and an operational concept that required such operational precision and technical sophistication that many Allies were precluded from participation in significant portions of the operation.[6]

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[5] Department of Defense, 15-16

[6] "Exploring the Transatlantic Link," *Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires/National War College Symposium* (Paris, France, March 2001)

France came to this situation with some pre-existing concerns about its roll as a strategic player in the transatlantic link. France has not been a member of the NATO military structure since 1966 when President Charles De Gaulle withdrew from that portion of the Alliance.[7] In 1996 the French made a bid to join the military structure but backed out when the NATO leadership would not agree to make a French officer the Commander of Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH), headquartered in Naples, Italy. The French are still searching for a means to establish themselves as a military power on the international stage.

The Allies determined that a possible resolution to these concerns was to enhance the military capabilities embodied in ESDP. ESDP originated at the Treaty on European Union Conference in Amsterdam and was initially designed to bring military functions of the Western European Union (WEU) into the EU and provide that organization with the means to intervene when appropriate in humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking (these tasks are known as the Petersberg Tasks that were originally adopted by the WEU).[8] The movement to enhance ESDP took shape at the Helsinki Conference of the EU in December 1999 when the leaders established the "Headline Goal." Specifically the "Headline Goal" states that by 2003 the EU will have a capability to deploy a Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) of corps level strength (60,000 troops), for crisis management operations, in less than 60 days and sustain that force for at least one year.[9]

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[7] Jeffrey B. Jones, "French Forces for the 21st Century," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Number 25, (Washington, D.C., Summer 2000), 32

[8] Dr. Javier Solana, "Common Foreign and Security Policy," reprint of Speech to the German Foreign Policy Association, Berlin, Germany, November 14, 2000, 4

[9] Presidency of the European Union, *Military Capabilities Commitment Declaration* (Washington, D.C., November 20, 2000), 1

The EU leadership has invested significant political capital in the ESDP concept and they are committed to seeing it to successful fruition. It is now up to the United States and other non-EU Allies to shape or influence the development of ESDP in such a way that it does not weaken the Alliance. This will be a difficult task. Three areas can already be seen as competing with NATO for resources and personnel. The first is rather obvious, EU member nations will not build additional units to provide manpower for the ESDP RRF. This troop commitment will come out of existing units that will be the same units that would be tasked for NATO operations. Second, the EU has determined that it will establish a separate European Union Military Staff for command and control of ESDP assets and operations. This staff will also be manned by the same personnel that would be tasked for NATO operations. Finally, the EU leadership has committed itself to the development of an organic strategic intelligence capability that is separate from NATO. This will obviously be an expensive endeavor.[10] It is readily apparent that there is conflict with Secretary Albright's Three D's statement in which she said the United States would support ESDP as long as there was no decoupling, discrimination or duplication. The measures listed above are in direct conflict with the concepts of decoupling (tasking forces committed to NATO with conflicting tasks for ESDP) and duplication (acquisition of capabilities and equipment that is the same as that required for NATO). The subject of discrimination is beyond the scope of this paper but deals with the status of the non-EU NATO Allies and their inclusion in EU security discussions.

[10] Presidency, 3

CLOSING THE GAP

There will be numerous obstacles to developing and executing a plan to close the capabilities gap between the United States and her European Allies. The United States will play a crucial role in closing the gap. First and foremost the United States is not going to "dumb down" its forces or even slow down in the attempts to transform the armed forces of the United States. Neither of these approaches would be beneficial to the United States or her Allies.[11] In light of this mindset the United States will have to spend a significant level of diplomatic effort to convince the Allies that the United States is not striving to intentionally widen the gap. Included in this effort should also be a plan to convince the Allies that they can rely on the United States to provide accurate intelligence information to NATO and the EU. This will be important as there is not enough money available to allow the EU to build its own intelligence gathering capability. Much of this diplomatic effort will have to be built into SACEUR's Theater Engagement Plan for Europe.

In the end game it will come down to money available and the priority for spending that money. ESDP does provide some political clout because there is more appeal in Europe to spend money on defense for ESDP than there is to support additional expenditures for NATO. There are however, some cultural issues that will make it difficult for the Allies to raise needed funds. Claude Lachaux argues that there are three "stubborn facts" that constrain defense spending in Western Europe. The first is the aging population of Europe. There is now a rapidly growing number of retired people receiving government pensions. The second is that the economies of the Allies are not as healthy as that of the United States and these governments cannot afford to

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[11] Michael Ryan, "Ryan Tells Coalitions: No English, No Compatible C2 – No Participation," *Aerospace Daily*, February 12, 2001, 1

spend the same proportion of GNP on defense spending as the United States does. Finally there is the economic burden of NATO and EU enlargement as well as the reconstruction efforts in the Balkans.[12]

Just recognizing that budgetary resources are scarce will not solve the problem. Specific steps will have to be taken by the United States and her Allies to close the gap. One area of effort should be in developing warfighting plans that allow the Allies to plug and play their capabilities into a given operation. This is analogous to modular construction of ships and aircraft that are re-configurable for different missions (like the space shuttle). No country in Europe will be able to generate a defense budget that will allow it to build effective capabilities across the warfighting spectrum similar to the United States. In stead each country will have to determine an area of strength that it can exploit and therefore contribute in a meaningful way. The United Kingdom and France could build joint maritime strike forces; the United States, France and the United Kingdom could coordinate cruise missile strikes; and Germany and the Benelux countries could deploy army cells linked via information and communication systems into a connected joint force for peacekeeping operations.[13]

Developing this type of modular capability will be tied to the other area that could make Euopean defense dollars more effective: major reforms in the defense industries of all of the Allies and the United States to allow them to operate effectively in the global economy. The United States has already initiated some changes with the implementation of the Defense Trade Security Initiative (DTSI). This program, launched in May 2000 will streamline the export

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[12] David S. Yost, "The NATO Capabilities Gap and the European Union," *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 4, (Winter 2000-01), 121

[13] Robbin F. Laird and Holger H. Mey, *The Revolution in Military Affairs: Allied Perspectives*, McNair Paper 60 (Washington, D.C., April 1999), 100

control process, improve the ability of industry on both sides of the Atlantic to share critical technologies while reducing the risk of their diversion to potential adversaries.[14]

The next step is to encourage multi-national cooperation among defense contractors to allow them to operate seamlessly across borders and around the clock. Current examples include the Microsoft Corporation that has workers writing software around the clock. When the software engineers in Seattle quit the engineers in India are starting their shift and when they are finished the engineers in Europe are on the job. Ford Motor Company is designing its world car with a global design team located throughout the world and working interactively 24 hours a day. Governments will set priorities based on power projection and the marketplace will generate the technological choices to meet the demands of the mission. To allow this transformation to begin state ownership of defense corporations will have to end. Only private companies will be able to form the corporate alliances and partnerships to operate flexibly in the global economy.[15] European and American budgets are not going to get any better. Innovation, determination and cooperation will be required to close the capabilities gap and create an effective and cohesive transatlantic fighting force for the future. A combined version of the Joint Experimentation Program at U.S. Joint Forces Command is a possible conduit to promote these ideas.

CONCLUSION

There is a large gap between the current capabilities of the armed forces of the United States and her European Allies. The United States has vital interests tied to the well being of her European Allies. Cohesive and effective military operations depend on interoperability between

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[14] Department of Defense, 17

[15] Laird, 57-59

elements engaged in those operations. The capabilities gap must be closed if the Transatlantic Alliance is going to cope with future threats.

The Joint structure of the United States armed forces has the tools in place to effectively deal with the task of closing the gap. The Theater Engagement planning process provides the vehicle to prepare the political environment to implement changes. The Joint Experimentation process provides the means to develop new global defense industry practices and technologies.

Competing national interests, limited resources, domestic political issues and the global nature of today's economy all produce obstacles to resolution of the capabilities gap. A concerted, combined effort tied to the will to succeed and the political leadership to rally the collective populations of the Transatlantic Allies behind the transformation will enable success.

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